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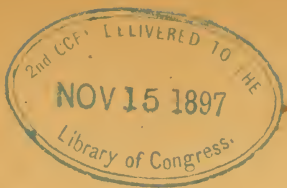
AMERICAN
ACTING
DRAMA

The First Kiss



A
COMEDY
IN ONE ACT
BY
Maurice
Hageman

CHICAGO
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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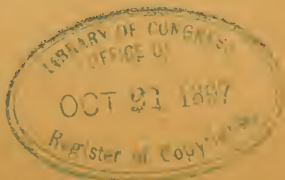
A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

MAURICE HAGEMAN

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S DIPLOMACY," "IN PAWN," "BY TELEPHONE," "A
CRAZY IDEA," "SONS OF THEIR SIRE," "PROF. ROBINSON," ETC.

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CHICAGO

THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

1897

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CAST OF CHARACTERS.

JACK LUDLOW—A young benedict.

LOUISE—His wife.

Plays twenty minutes.

Costumes of to-day.

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THE FIRST KISS.

Scene.—*A handsomely furnished drawing-room. In L. flat a glass door leading to a balcony, which overlooks a garden. In R. flat an arch with portieres, leading to a vestibule. Down stage L. a practicable fireplace with a mantelpiece over which hangs a large looking-glass. On the mantelpiece are an ormolu clock, some statues or vases, and other bric-a-brac. Before the fireplace is a round table with an elegant cover and on it a handsome lamp, some books, albums, etc. Near the table some chairs. R. 2, a window with lace drapery curtains, near which is an open desk with writing materials, etc. Lateral doors R. and L. In C. of stage is a round causeuse. Other furniture, statues, paintings, and bric-a-brac added.*

Louise. [*Discovered alone, seated at table L. She is occupied in cutting the leaves of a book with a paper-knife, which is fashioned like a dagger.*] “Her firm resolution”—the new novel, which is making such a sensation just now! Auntie says its heroine should serve me as an example. [*Sighs.*] Heigho, what a miserable existence is mine! [*Sees Jack coming from R.*] Ah, my husband. [*Pretends to be absorbed in her book.*]

Jack. [*Entering R. F. with a bouquet, which he hides behind his back. Places his hat, gloves and cane on hat-rack C. back.*] Here I am again!

Louise. [*Indifferently, looks up.*] So I perceive, again! I wish you would put an end to this unbearable persecution!

Jack. [*Laughing and good-naturedly.*] Persecution? You should rather call it devotion. Surely my affection for you is a perfectly lawful one!

Louise. No, it is criminal!

Jack. Criminal? But, am I not your husband?

Louise. You ought not to be !

Jack. Yes, we are often what we ought not to be !

Louise. So much the worse !

Jack. Louise, to-morrow you will celebrate your first birthday since our wedding. Will you not on the eve of that joyous occasion try to treat me with a little kindness? [*Offers his bouquet.*]

Louise. [*Declining it.*] All your attempts to change my resolution are in vain. I repeat what I told you before our wedding.

Jack. What childish nonsense !

Louise. Indeed ? Well, maybe ! but now—kindly leave me !

Jack. Leave you ? No ! I prefer to remain and put up with your romantic notions ! [*Tenderly.*] At least I will be able to see and hear you ! [*Offers her his bouquet.*]

Louise. [*Again declining it.*] When you asked so persistently for my hand in marriage, I considered it my duty to confess to you that since my earliest childhood I had loved my cousin Tom, and that we had sworn to love each other until eternity. You declared it did not matter and called our love youthful pranks. My poor father, who was at that time dangerously ill, took sides with you. Our union was, he told me, for various reasons, his ardent wish and will. To disobey him might have been his end,—I obeyed,—but I previously declared to you that I could never love, that I never would grant you even so much as a kiss, therefore you have no right to complain now of our unfortunate mutual situation, nor of my lack of candiness !

Jack. No, I suppose I haven't, and as far as your resolutions are concerned, you have manfully stuck to them. Many a man would have hesitated to wed you under these peculiar circumstances, but I loved you so—I had commenced to look upon life as a hideous nightmare. [*Offers her the bouquet.*]

Louise. [*Indifferently pushing the bouquet away.*] Your feelings, sir, are absolutely indifferent to me !

Jack. I know I am unable to make you forget Tom, I know that any comparison between us will be unfavorable to me ; I know all of that ! I possess neither his intellectual gifts, nor his elegant figure. [*Aside.*] He's so thin you could pull him through a pneumatic tire. [*Aloud.*] He is pale, æsthetic, romantically interesting, while I, -unfortunately, am healthy, athletic and strong ! [*Louise is about to speak, but he stops her with a gesture.*] Of course, this is not fashionable, not *comme-il-faut*, I know—I know, I am sorry for it, but really I can't

help it, and you ought not to blame me. He happens to be a poetical, one-foot-in-the-grave young man; and I am an ordinary three meals a day, kicking and alive sort of a chap.

Louise. What's the use of all this talk? Now, Tom——

Jack. [*Interrupting her and annoyed.*] Do you still love him?

Louise. I have been taught that it is vulgar and low to tell a lie, therefore I shall not answer!

Jack. [*With suppressed anger.*] You admit then that you still love him! I suppose you keep up a highly romantic clandestine correspondence with him!

Louise. [*Rising and indignantly.*] Sir! This is an insult! I——

Jack. [*Interrupting.*] The postal authorities ought to refuse to carry and deliver such immoral matter! There should be a law against it!

Louise. Enough, sir! We have never written a line to each other! I have never even laid eyes on any of his handwriting! I should not know it if I saw it!

Jack. [*Pacified and good-naturedly.*] There, there, my dear, I'll take your word for it! But it's all so confoundedly stupid!

Louise. Stupid? Sir!

Jack. [*Trying to pacify her.*] I beg your pardon, I should have said, "idiotic!" The fact of the matter is that you are my wife, and these kindergarten love fancies are but dreams!

Louise. Oh, no!

Jack. Oh, yes! I shall no longer suffer these imaginary boarding-school ideas to rob me of my happiness! Great heavens,—what has kept me from calling this fellow out and killing him in a duel?

Louise. Kill him? I should have died with him!

Jack. Yes, I suppose so! That's what has prevented it, I think! But I might have shot an ear off, or maybe his nose! A noseless rival is less dangerous!

Louise. I don't know! It all depends, monster!

Jack. Louise, will you have a little sense?

Louise. No, sir, never!

Jack. [*Throwing himself on a chair.*] And this is what they call the honeymoon!

Louise. You are yourself to blame! I warned you in time!

Jack. You did, but think of my love, my hopes! [*Louise is about to go, he jumps up.*] Stay, for pity's sake, stay! I prefer your sarcasm, your insults, your fury to your absence!

Louise. As you please, but then stop your complaints !

Jack. I will ! You are right, it is getting monotonous ! But I love you so well, that something in my inmost being tells me not to lose heart, for that some day you will relent. And thus I continue to hope, to sigh, to suffer !

Louise. It will be useless ! And auntie thinks I am right. Has she not been a second mother to me, and would she advise me wrongfully ? Because I knew she had my welfare at heart, I invited her to come and stay with us,—with me, I should say. No, do not ask me to love you ; it is impossible ! You know I swore to be true to Tom, and I shall keep my oath. And so will he, I know.

Jack. And so I am compelled to live above the coach-house on the other side of the garden, over there, [*points to balcony*] while you and [*sarcastically*] “auntie” hold the fort here !

Louise. Tom’s last words to me before our marriage were : “ Louise, your father may die, if you do not become this fellow’s wife ! ”

Jack. He fellowed me, eh ? [*Aside.*] I really ought to shoot his nose off !

Louise. “ Therefore marry him,” he said, “ but the day when I hear that you also *love* him, will be my last ! ” And therefore I asked auntie to come and live with me, and asked you to live in the coach-house. You could not expect to live in the same house with me under the peculiar circumstances, and if you had gone to live in a hotel, there would have been talk and scandal. So the coach-house was your only alternative. Tom knows of this and has proof of my loyalty to him. Auntie says he’d surely kill himself otherwise.

Jack. Bah, he hasn’t got the courage to do it ! [*Sighs.*] I only wish he had, and had occasion to !

Louise. [*Going to door R.*] Good-bye ! I must go and see how auntie is !

Jack. Are you going ? Very well ! I am boiling over with affection, with love, just like a pot of coffee, and you refuse to drop an egg in it. But there may be others who will not be so cruel, and that will settle it.

Louise. What ? The coffee ?

Jack. No. This absurd situation !

Louise. [*Suddenly turning back and going towards Jack ; dramatically.*] Jack, I am true to Tom, would you become untrue to me ?

Jack. Well, under the circumstances, what else can you expect ?

Louise. Very well, then ! My indifference will simply be changed to contempt and scorn.

Jack. Scorn ? No, no, not that ! Your indifference is quite sufficient ! I'll let the coffee boil over !

Louise. As you please ! Once more, adieu ! I have a call to make with auntie.

Jack. Will you allow me to accompany you ? [*Offers her the bouquet.*]

Louise. [*Declining it.*] Impossible ! Tom might see us together and form wrong conclusions.

Jack. [*Aside.*] Tom ! Tom ! He'll pay for this with his blood ! [*Suddenly, aloud.*] Louise, should you ever come to your senses——

Louise. Sir !

Jack. Should you ever commence to feel a spark of pity for your much abused and unfortunate husband, should you ever get tired of "auntie's" company,—then place this lamp there, in front of the balcony, and I will sail forth from the icebox,—I mean the coach-house, and come to you over the garden wall on the pinions of Love.

Louise. Hope not in vain. I could never do it ! Auntie says I would have a murder on my conscience ! [*She crosses to L. and arranges her hair, etc., before the mirror over the mantelpiece.*]

Jack. [*Aside.*] Auntie ! auntie ! always auntie ! Damn auntie ! When I commenced to court Louise, she imagined I was after her, and now, out of spite, she has put my wife against me, and plugs for that dyspeptic, consumptive, pneumatic-tire individual ! Saints above us, if I could only get rid of auntie ! [*Louise has finished arranging her toilet and is about to go ; aloud.*] Louise, will you not accept my bouquet ?

Louise. No, thanks ! It might hurt Tom's feelings if he heard I had accepted flowers from you.

Jack. [*Angrily throws bouquet on causeuse in C. ; aside.*] Tom again ! It's too much ! I can't stand it. I'll speak to auntie, and she'll either listen to reason and knock all nonsensical romance out of her niece's head, or I'll knock Tom's head to pieces and sing that spindleshank dude a song, of which he won't like to listen to an encore. [*Ex. quickly door R. 2 E.*]

Louise. [*Alone, after Jack has gone, she runs to door R. and looks after him, shuts the door and runs to bouquet on causeuse C., kneels down and covers it with kisses.*] His sweet flowers ! How kind he is ! [*Rises slowly.*] My heart breaks when I see how he suffers ! But how can I help it ?

He must be punished for his vanity and the overestimation of his own qualities in marrying me, when he knew I loved Tom, and for thinking that he might without any trouble supplant him in my love! Did he think my heart was made of wax and that he could use it to suit his own lordly fancies? [*Pauses; slowly.*] But still that is what he has done, only I am too proud to acknowledge it, and bow my head before him in submission! If I did—I would be his slave for life! Not that I should mind that a bit, but there's auntie,—she thinks Tom would really kill himself; if he knew. And then he would be sure to reappear again as a ghost, and I'm so afraid of them! Just think of Tom as a ghost, and he's so thin already, covered with nothing but a bedsheet, and blood all over it—b-r-r-r-r! Ah, I hear Jack returning—on with my mask again, but first—
[*She kisses the bouquet again, takes one rose from it, which she hides in her dress, places the bouquet on the table L., and resumes her former cold attitude.*]

Jack. [*Entering door R.; aside.*] Auntie is as funny as an owl, we ought to send her to a menagerie. However she seems amenable to reason. [*Aloud.*] Poor auntie has a headache, but she will be ready for you in a minute.

Louise. Thank you! [*The stage gradually commences to grow dark. Sunset effect through R. 2 E., and balcony L. F.*]

Jack. [*Gladly.*] And she has graciously allowed me to come along, to offer her my arm! [*Goes to hat-rack to take his hat and cane.*]

Louise. Indeed? [*After a little pause.*] Then I will stay at home!—

Jack. So much the better! I'll stay here with you; let auntie go alone!

Louise. No, excuse me, but you must go with her!

Jack. And you?

Louise. I told you—I'll remain here!

Jack. [*Disgusted.*] Don't you think it's bad enough for you not to love me? Are you also ashamed to be seen in my company?

Louise. [*Determinedly.*] If you go, I'll stay!

Jack. And if I stay, you'll go?

Louise. Exactly!

Jack. [*Furiously.*] Well, I'll be teetotally, doggoned—

Louise. [*Stopping him.*] Jack, remember you are not at the— [*Name of some theater.*]

Jack. [*Exasperated.*] Great Scott, anyone would excuse a man in my fix for swearing a little!

Louise. [*Coolly.*] Well, how is it to be? Are you going to stay, or do you want to go? Choose!

Jack. I'll stay! You'd better go! The fresh evening air will do you good!

Louise. [*Aside.*] Always thoughtful of my welfare! [*Aloud.*] Then—good-bye!

Jack. [*Detaining her.*] Louise, haven't you forgotten something? Won't you take these? [*Points to bouquet on table L.*]

Louise. [*Places her hand on the hidden rose.*] No, I have forgotten nothing! [*Aside.*] How I would like to give him a good hug, if it was not for that old ghost! [*Sighs, shrugs her shoulders, looks a moment at Jack, who is leaning on the table L., looking at the flowers, and ex. slowly R. door, still gazing at him. Stage completely dark. Jack sighs, lights the lamp on the table L. and comes down stage. Lights up full.*]

Jack. Sometimes I really don't know where I am at! Am I married or not? Was that my wife just now, or only a living picture? [*Suddenly, and working himself into a rage.*] But I'll put an end to all this, it's lasted long enough! I'll puncture that pneumatic-tire fellow! [*Sits down near table L.*] But one thing I swear—I'll kiss my wife before to-morrow, if I have to do it before her mummy-faced auntie! How to accomplish it though, that's the question. Ah, an idea! [*Fumps up.*] If I also threatened her with suicide! To make her choose between us two—Tom or Jerry—I mean Jack! Perhaps she'd make us draw straws! She married me to save her father's life, she obstinately refuses to love me to save her cousin's life, since she is in the life-saving business—to save mine she might [*pauses*—no, I don't think she would! And if I scared her into loving me, she might faint and get sick, and there would be a doctor's bill to pay! Is there no way out of this? Ah, another idea! She said she didn't know Tom's handwriting! I have it! I'll have to change my own somewhat! [*Goes to desk R., sits down and commences to write.*] "My darling Louise,—Kindly grant me a short interview to-night. I am anxiously awaiting your answer behind the garden wall. Wave your handkerchief from the balcony of your room, when you are ready to receive me. Turn down the lights, so that nobody will see me, when I climb the apple-tree." [*runs to balcony, looks out and returns to desk*—No, it's a peach-tree "climb the peach-tree to your balcony. My life is at stake." [*To the audience.*] That "life at stake" formula will settle her! It's a peach. [*Writing.*] "Yours till eternity—Tom." And now the address! [*Writes.*] "Mrs. Jno. Ludlow—En Villa." So!

[*Closes envelope.*] How to get it delivered ! [*Goes to balcony and looks out.*] Ah, there's our gardener ! Lucky ! [*Calling.*] :1 Thompson ! Oh, Thompson ! What's that you've got there ? What ? A letter for my wife ? Oh, I see ! As soon as she comes home, eh ? All right ! Here, give her this one at the same time, but don't tell her it came from me ! Say they came together ! Now then, catch ! [*Throws letter from balcony. He holds out his hand.*] Ah, it's commencing to rain slightly ! I bet that will bring her home again. She must have gone out on foot, for I can see the coachman cleaning the harness across the lawn. Yes, by Jingo, there they come round the corner, auntie trailing behind, puffing like a steamtug ! There, Thompson has given her the letters ! Now to make myself scarce, and to watch, in this rain. [*Takes his hat, turns up his collar and ex. door L. 3 E. Enter Louise D. R. F. with two letters in her hand. These letters must be in two distinct and different envelopes. She takes off her hat and cloak while speaking.*]

Louise. I'm glad it started to rain, and we had to come back ! Poor fellow, I am teasing him ! He's gone and I suppose he is angry ! Ah ! [*Sighs, sits down near table L. and looks at the two letters.*] Strange, two letters in unknown hand-writings at a time ! [*Opens Jack's letter, and throws the other one on the table.*] From Tom ! Heavens ! [*Follows the lines quickly.*] What ? Receive him here alone ? Now ? No,—impossible ! And still it may be fate ! It would be our first meeting since our wedding, and I might take the occasion to release Tom from his vows, and to beg—to pray him to restore me to my freedom of conscience, my liberty ! Has not poor Jack been punished enough already ? But still to be alone with him, all alone—the courage fails me ! Ah, what a glorious idea ! Auntie will receive him in my place, and ask him to forgive and forget me ! He is waiting near the garden wall for the signal ! So be it ! [*Goes to balcony.*]

Jack. [*Slightly opening door L. and watching her.*] She has read the note ! Ah ! she waves her handkerchief ! The signal ! [*Hides again.*]

Louise. Now quick to call auntie ! [*Ex. down R.*]

Jack. [*Coming slowly down stage.*] I commence to feel quite uncomfortable at the idea of going to be quite alone with my wife, that I'll fold her in my arms and press her to my heart, and thinking at the same time that she'll take all these endearments as coming from another fellow ! It's a damnable situation ! I'm my own rival ! I'm husband and lover ! Trickster and tricked ! Victor and vanquished ! She comes, I can no

longer vaseline, I mean vacillate ! Quick, down to the garden mud, by the back staircase ! [*Ex. door L.*]

Louise. [*Entering the door R.*] Auntie is lying down with her usual nerve attack and I didn't have the heart to disturb her ! [*Noise is heard off stage, L. U. E.*] Oh, he's jumped over the garden wall ! If Jack should see him ! [*Takes lamp off R. door. Stage dark.*] How I tremble, but there's no way out of it ! Heaven give me strength and courage !

Jack. [*Climbs over the balcony banisters and comes down on tip-toes, aside.*] I can now imagine how a poor burglar feels ! [*Aloud, changing his voice to a high falsetto to imitate Tom's.*] Louise, are you there ?

Louise. [*Trembling.*] Yes !

Jack. Where are you ? Give me your hand !

Louise. My hand ? Never ! Keep away from me !

Jack. [*Aside in his natural voice.*] She refuses ! Good ! But that proves nothing ! They always refuse at first ! [*Works his way gradually to R. near desk.*]

Louise. [*Crossing behind causeuse to L.*] Tom, I have consented to see you, but—

Jack. [*Feeling his way ; aside.*] I've lost my bearings ! [*Bumps against desk.*] Oh, there's the desk ! [*Upsets writing material and inkstand ; in so doing he blackens his fingers.*] Great Scott, I've upset something ! [*Aloud as before.*] Louise, give me your hand, your sweet, little plump hand ! [*Moving to L.*]

Louise. Tom, I forbid you to come any nearer ! [*Runs up stage L., passes behind causeuse to R., and comes down stage R.*]

Jack. [*Near table L.*] But why this extreme coyness ? [*Picks up paper-knife ; aside.*] The paper-knife ! Bravo ! [*Aloud.*] Louise, have pity on me, or I will not answer for the consequences ! I am armed !

Louise. [*Alarmed.*] Armed ? Oh, heavens !

Jack. Convince yourself ! [*He holds the handle of the paper-knife towards her ; she touches it and jumps back in fright.*] Louise, if this meeting is not to be a happy one, I'll blow my brains out with this—this—this—Cuban machete. [*Aside.*] That's a corker.

Louise. But Tom, reflect, I am married, I have a husband !

Jack. That's usual when you're married !

Louise. Against my will, you know ! I was compelled !

Jack. [*Aside.*] Very flattering ! [*Aloud.*] But you do not love him, eh ? Answer, tell me you do not love your husband !

Louise. [*Aside.*] He'll kill himself if I tell him the truth !

Jack. Speak! The point of my yatagan pierces my flannel shirt.

Louise. [*Quickly.*] No, no. I do not love him!

Jack. [*Fiercely, turning towards her.*] Say, you hate him! [*Grabs her wrist.*]

Louise. [*Trembling.*] I—I hate him!

Jack. [*Releasing her, aside.*] That's a pleasant confession. It's monstrous. [*Aloud, tenderly.*] Angel, give me your fairy hand!

Louise. [*Aside.*] After all it may be best. I may the sooner get rid of him, and there's no harm in it. [*Aloud.*] But after I give you my hand you must go.

Jack. Yes, yes! I'll go—afterwards! [*Takes her hand; aside.*] She really gives him her hand, it's scandalous! [*Aloud.*] And now let me print one kiss on it!

Louise. [*Pulling her hand away.*] No, never!

Jack. Must I die?

Louise. No, no! For heaven's sake—not that! But then, will you leave me at once?

Jack. Immediately! [*She offers her hand, which he kisses; aside.*] The female crocodile, to let that fellow kiss her hand! [*Aloud.*] Yes, Louise, I will go, after I have pressed you to my burning heart! [*Is about to embrace her.*]

Louise. [*With firmness.*] Oh, Tom, not that!

Jack. Louise, will you refuse me to-night one of those sweet kisses with which you formerly used to make me so happy? [*Aside.*] That was awfully risky!

Louise. [*Angrily.*] Sir, are you going crazy? When have you ever dared to offer me such an insult?

Jack. [*Aside.*] Thank the Lord! How noble she is in her justified anger! It's taken a load of my mind!

Louise. Enough, sir! Leave me at once!

Jack. Leave you? Now? Never! [*Passes up and down as if in anger.*]

Louise. [*Aside.*] How can I get rid of him? If I could only get that dagger away from him! [*Aloud.*] Now, please, Tom, don't get excited!

Jack. [*Aside.*] What? She hesitates? Then she's lost! Oh, woman, woman! If I wasn't myself, who knows what might happen to me! Luckily I am here to see that she doesn't go too far with the other fellow!

Louise. [*Aside.*] Ah, I have it! [*Aloud.*] Come, Tom, sit down here beside me! [*Sits down on causeuse C. and makes place for Jack.*]

Jack. [*Aside.*] I wouldn't ask for anything better, if I wasn't the other fellow. [*Sits down beside Louise.*]

Louise. Give me your hand !

Jack. [*Aside.*] My hand ! Faithless wretch ! [*Gives her his hand ; aloud.*] Adored one !

Louise. Now promise me to be sensible and cool !

Jack. I promise, my angel ! [*Aside.*] Hypocrite !

Louise. Put both your hands in mine !

Jack. [*Aside.*] Both ? Abominable ! She is making the advances now !

Louisa. Well ?

Jack. [*Aside.*] I'll see how far her treachery will go ! [*Puts paper-knife between them and places his hands in her left one. She grabs the knife with her right hand and throws it under the desk R. He quickly embraces her. She jumps up and pushes him from her.*]

Louise. Traitor, begone !

Jack. [*Jumping up ; aside.*] She's allowed me, I mean the other fellow to kiss her ! I'll sue for a divorce !

Louise. Oh, heavens !

Jack. What is it ?

Louise. I hear footsteps ! My husband is coming ! Go quickly !

Jack. On one condition !

Louise. What is it ?

Jack. Write me a note,—I'll wait in the garden below,—throw it from the balcony,—let me know when and where we shall meet again ! [*Aside.*] That will settle the divorce question !

Louise. Yes, but begone at once.

Jack. Farewell, adored one ! [*Aside.*] Serpent !

Louise. Good-bye ! Go ! Go ! [*Jack climbs over the balcony and exit.*]

Louise. [*Alone ; goes to door R., and brings out the lamp, which she places on desk R. All lights up full.*] Well, I've never been so astonished in all my life. To think that Tom, who has always been so modest and gentle could behave like this ! Now I despise him ! I shall never speak to him again ! Listen, he is walking up and down beneath the balcony ! If Jack should discover him ! I must write that note, or he'll never go ! [*Sits down at desk.*] Everything here is upset, even the inkstand ! Tom must have done this in the dark ! I'll use a pencil ! [*Writes and speaks while writing.*] I'll make him feel sorry for this ! To dare to kiss me ! The impudent fellow !

I shall have no more pity on him ! He may commit suicide for all I care, ghost or no ghost ! Even my husband has never dared to take such a liberty, and yet he is entitled to it, and I wish he would ! [*Finishes writing, places note in envelope, which she seals and goes to balcony ; softly.*] Tom !

Jack. [*Outside.*] Dearest !

Louise. Here ! [*Throws letter out.*] Ah, he's going ! Thank heaven, he has vanished in the dark ! [*Comes down stage.*] And now to rest ! I need it after this scene ! [*Goes to table L.*] Here's that letter still unopened ! [*Goes to desk R., opens letter and reads.*] What's this ? From Tom's mother, announcing his engagement to Lily Burbank ! [*She falls in chair.*] Am I dreaming ? Then it can't have been Tom who was here just now ! Could it have been Jack ? I'll make sure of it. [*Takes lamp from desk and places it on small table before the balcony.*] Now, I'll have my last revenge on him, poor fellow ! [*Sits down near table L.*]

Jack. [*Entering hastily R. F.*] Yes, the lamp is there ! I didn't dream. [*Takes up lamp and comes down stage.*] Louise, was this signal meant for me ?

Louise. [*Aside.*] His fingers are full of ink ! There can be no mistake ! [*Aloud.*] Yes, I wanted you ! [*Aside.*] To punish you, traitor.

Jack. [*Puts lamp on desk.*] And to what lucky circumstance do I owe this unlooked for happiness !

Louise. I wasn't feeling quite well ! I'm burning with fever !

Jack. [*Aside.*] And she has called her husband to cool her down !

Louise. But I am feeling slightly better now ! Thanks ! You can go back ! I shall not need you any more !

Jack. [*Aside.*] I've had no time as yet to read that treacherous note.

Louise. Pardon me, if I have disturbed you !

Jack. Don't mention it, but hadn't I better go and get you some medicine.

Louise. No, thanks ! It'll pass ! Good-night !

Jack. [*Aside.*] Good-night, eh ? No, I must speak ! I must have an explanation, or I'll bust a bloodvessel ! [*Aloud.*] Louise, I wish to speak with you on a grave and serious subject !

Louise. [*Aside.*] It's coming ! I can hardly keep from laughing ! [*Aloud.*] Well sir, I'm at your pleasure, only, please, hurry, it can't be of much consequence !

Jack. Not of much consequence ? No, may be not to you !

It's only about your husband's honor and peace of mind ! [*Suddenly.*] False woman, I know all !

Louise. Indeed ? All about what ?

Jack. [*Dramatically.*] I know that only a short while ago you have received a man in this very room ! [*Sees that his fingers are full of ink ; aside.*] Oh, the devil, I upset the ink-stand just now ! [*Aides his hands behinds him ; aloud.*] Do you day dare to deny it, madam ?

Louise. If I tell you the entire truth, will you promise me to remain quite calm ?

Jack. I do ! [*Aside.*] I wonder what she is going to say in explanation !

Louise. Will you swear it ?

Jack. I swear it. [*Lifts up his hand, looks at the ink, and hides it again quickly.*]

Louise. Yes, then, I confess it—a man was here but a short time ago !

Jack. [*Angrily.*] So, you admit it.

Louise. I do !

Jack. [*Excitedly.*] All right ! That's enough ! I'll bring suit ! I'll get a divorce. [*Goes angrily up and down.*]

Louise. You've sworn to remain cool,—keep your word ! Furthermore, he is still here !

Jack. What's that ? [*Aside.*] Can Tom have entered here in reality after I left ? [*Aloud.*] He is here, eh ?

Louise. Yes !

Jack. Then I'll kill him !

Louise. Kill him ? But he's in my house,—my guest !

Jack. That's why I'll kill him ! Why didn't he stay in his own house ? Any jury will exonerate me, if I kill him ! That is to say, if they're all married men !

Louise. [*Imploring him mock-dramatically.*] Jack, if you kill that man, you will kill me at the same time, and yourself too !

Jack. Myself too, eh ? Don't you fool yourself ! It'll make me feel a better man ! [*He searches everywhere.*] Where did you hide him ? The scoundrel ! The disturber of my domestic felicity ! [*Points to door L.*] Ah, may be he is in there !

Louise. [*Places herself before the door.*] Jack !

Jack. Out of my way, faithless wretch ! [*Slings her to c. and opens the door.*] Come out of there, sir ! Out, I say ! [*Ex. door, L.*]

Louise. [*Alone, bursts out laughing.*] Ahaha !

Jack. [*Re-entering.*] He's gone ! He must have escaped

by the back stairs ! But no matter ! [*Takes out note.*] Here will be cause enough for a separation ! [*Places chair C. of stage and sits down ; opens note ; to Louise.*] Down on your knees, madam,—on your knees !

Louise. [*Kneels to him mock-dramatically.*] Jack, for pity's sake, have mercy ! [*She leans with her right arm on his left knee, he looks at her, pushes her off, and turns the chair away from her.*]

Jack. [*Reading.*] Eh, what's this ? [*Reading.*] " True love cannot be hidden long, especially when legitimate." [*Louise has gone to the other side of him, kneels again and repeats same business as before.*] She calls her love for him legitimate !

Louise. Yes, dear ! [*Jack pushes her off again. Same play as before to the other side*]

Jack. Her ideas of what's legitimate are slightly muddled. [*To Louise.*] Don't you blush for your own immoral principles ?

Louise. No, dear !

Jack. [*Jumps from the chair. Louise sits down in it.*] It's unheard of—unbearable. [*Reading.*] " He who possesses my heart." [*Aside.*] Oh, I could jump out of the window ! [*Reflecting.*] No, I couldn't, it's too high ! [*Reading.*] " My heart is not yours, Tom," What's that ? Is there still another one ?— " but it is my own dear husband's, my noble and patient Jack ! [*Staggers.*] Jack ! I ! I know—it's night ! I'm in bed and dreaming !

Louise. It's no dream, Jack ! But now it's my turn ! Come here. [*Imitating him.*] Down on your knees, sir,—on your knees !

Jack. On my knees ! On all fours, if you wish it ! Louise, you have made me so happy, and I've made such an ass of myself ! [*Kneels.*]

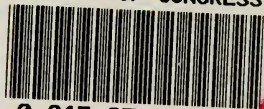
Louise. [*Takes his head in her hands and kisses him.*] What will poor auntie say !

Jack. Oh, auntie be——

Louise. Jack !

CURTAIN.

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